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CO
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER CHECKLIST FOR VISIT OF DEPUTY
SECRETARY JOHN D. NEGROPONTE

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Classified By: CDA Milton K. Drucker
Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

Introduction

1. (C) Your visit follows President Uribe's May 2-4 visit to Washington. Uribe fears unsubstantiated claims in the Colombian Congress that he and his family are tied to the paramilitaries are undermining prospects in the U.S. Congress for continued high aid levels and ratification of the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (CTPA). Uribe needs substantial U.S aid and the CTPA to help him finish the fight against narcoterrorism and to manage a complex domestic and regional climate. He supports our efforts to locate and rescue the three U.S. hostages held by the FARC. Uribe remains popular with the Colombian public, but faces major challenges in preventing the rise of new criminal groups following the paramilitary demobilization, addressing human rights concerns, and maintaining governability while supporting efforts to uncover links between the former paramilitaries and members of Colombia's political, military, and economic elites. He maintains an uneasy, yet cordial, relationship with Venezuelan President Chavez, and is trying to maintain a dialogue with Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa. Key issues:

- U.S. Support for Plan Colombia
- U.S. Hostages
- Free Trade
- Paramilitary Investigations
- Drug Eradication and Narcotrafficking
- Colombia's Regional Influence
- Extradition
- Human Rights
- New Criminal Groups and Reintegration
- FARC and ELN

U.S. Support for Plan Colombia

¶2. (C) U.S. assistance is key to help Colombia defeat narcotics trafficking and terrorism. Uribe presented the international community with a Plan Colombia Consolidation proposal in January which seeks to lock in sustained, high levels of U.S. and international support over the next five years. The proposal emphasizes continued strong counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts aimed at establishing GOC control throughout the national territory, but it also substantially boosts resources for education, health, Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, and development. We publicly welcomed the proposal and are working with Colombia to obtain European support as well. We are also urging Colombia to fund an increasing portion of Plan Colombia components currently financed by the U.S., but little progress has been made to date. Uribe fears Colombian congressional debates on paramilitary links to politicians, including charges that he and his family have paramilitary ties, have harmed his image in the U.S. and adversely affected prospects for Plan Colombia Consolidation and CTPA ratification. Uribe was frustrated by former Vice President Gore's withdrawal from an April 20 environmental event in Miami due to Uribe's participation. We have no evidence linking Uribe to paramilitaries.

U.S. Hostages

¶3. (C) The FARC has held three Americans for four years. Uribe supports our efforts to locate and rescue them. He has many times committed, publicly and privately, to ensuring the three U.S. hostages are included in any humanitarian exchange. The families of the FARC's so-called political hostages, including the Americans, are pressing Uribe to negotiate a humanitarian exchange with the FARC. The FARC

refuses to provide recent proof of life of our hostages, and insists the GOC demilitarize an area long ago captured from the FARC before starting humanitarian talks. With GOC authorization, officials from three European countries--France, Spain and Switzerland--met a senior FARC official in March to revive talks, but prospects for progress remain bleak.

Free Trade

¶4. (C) The Colombian Congress is in the process of CTPA approval, with two of the four required votes successfully completed. Uribe considers ratification essential for Colombia to receive long-term investment, increase economic growth, create jobs, and boost government revenues needed to fund social spending. He is confident of Colombian congressional approval, but is concerned the U.S. Congress will delay or reject Colombia. The Colombians accept proposed Democratic changes to the text, but are worried about the form. U.S. failure to approve the CTPA soon would be a major political blow to Uribe. It would also boost Venezuelan President Chavez' alternative ALBA and convince many our talk of a longer term strategic relationship is a pipe dream.

Paramilitary Investigations

¶5. (C) Uribe's democratic security policy and the paramilitary demobilization have created the space needed for Colombia's institutions--the Courts, National Prosecutor, and media--to work and provided incentives for individuals to tell the truth about their crimes. Colombia's judicial institutions are exposing ties between the paramilitaries and members of Colombia's political elite. Six members of Congress are in jail for alleged paramilitary ties; two more are under house arrest; one is on the lam; and eight more are

under investigation. One governor is in prison, and another is under investigation. The former head of the GOC intelligence service, who was a close Uribe ally, was jailed for links to paramilitary crimes, but released on a technicality. He remains subject to rearrest. Uribe strongly supports these investigations even though most of those implicated to date are members of his coalition. Despite the scandal, Colombia's Congress continues to function, moving forward on CTPA ratification and key fiscal measures.

Drug Eradication and Narcotrafficking

16. (C) Uribe is committed to fighting narcotrafficking, but is frustrated record aerial and manual eradication numbers do not appear to be reducing coca crops. The CIA will soon release its annual coca cultivation estimate. If it shows an increase, both Uribe and the U.S. will be assailed by critics, who will claim aerial spraying of herbicide does not work. Still, the UN cultivation estimate will show a decrease of 10 percent or more compared to the previous estimate. Uribe is concerned about the competing numbers and will be more so if the U.S. estimate shows an increase and the UN estimate shows a drop. The GOC uses the UN figure as its official estimate. Uribe will ask for greater U.S. resources to end narcotrafficking. We are planning to give him less.

Colombia's Regional Influence

17. (C) Uribe is working with Peru, Chile, Mexico, and Central America to strengthen regional economic and security cooperation. He envisions a Pacific Coast bloc of like-minded democracies linked through interlocking free trade agreements, including deals with the U.S., and committed to greater integration that would be a de facto alternative to Chavez' Bolivarian model. Recent visits by Peruvian and Chilean Presidents Garcia and Bachelet appear to have accelerated that process. Colombia's close commercial ties and shared border with Venezuela lead Uribe to maintain cordial relations with Venezuelan President Chavez despite sharp ideological differences but he vigorously defends Colombia's security and commercial interests. Uribe is

reaching out to Ecuador's Rafael Correa, but fears Correa's unpredictable nature and close ties to Chavez.

Extradition

18. (C) Uribe is aware of the high priority the U.S. Congress places on extraditions of drug traffickers. Colombia is the best U.S. partner in the world on extraditions, with over 430 traffickers and terrorists sent to the U.S. since Uribe took office in 2002. Uribe has suspended the extradition of four narcotraffickers due to their participation in the paramilitary demobilization process. Human rights groups argue several paramilitaries violated the terms of the demobilization process and should be extradited. The GOC has not made such a determination, preferring to keep the paramilitaries in the Justice and Peace Law Process for now.

Human Rights

19. (C) Colombia's human rights record is improving, but progress in the prosecution of major human rights violators, especially involving military personnel, remains slow. The recent UN High Commissioner on Human Rights' annual report on Colombia recognized advances, but flagged an increase in extrajudicial killings by the military as a concern. We

regularly push for progress on emblematic cases, but Colombia's historically dysfunctional criminal justice system is an obstacle. We are helping Colombia transition from its antiquated inquisitorial system to an accusatorial system -- a process that now covers 75 percent of the population -- and this will speed progress in recent human rights cases. A proposed reform of the military criminal justice system will also help. We are working with the GOC to implement legislation to achieve justice and reparations, as well as to strengthen protection programs for victims and witnesses. We also support a special prosecutorial team set up by the National Prosecutor's Office to investigate 204 crimes against union members.

New Criminal Groups and Reintegration of the Demobilized

¶10. (C) The rise of new criminal groups in areas previously controlled by the paramilitaries is a growing problem. The new groups lack the national structure and political ambitions of the defunct United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), and the GOC has set up police stations in rural areas as well as joint police-military task forces to combat them. We support Colombia's efforts to reintegrate 32,000 former paramilitaries into civilian life, but these efforts are hampered by the magnitude of the problem and insufficient resources. The lag in effective reintegration programs and the easy money of narcotrafficking and extortion have led some ex-paramilitaries to return to crime. Still, only a relatively small number of paramilitaries are believed to have joined the new criminal groups.

FARC and ELN

¶11. (C) Increased Colombian military pressure forced the FARC to withdraw to rural areas and reduced its military capabilities, but has not compelled the group to start serious peace negotiations. Narcotics trafficking continues to finance operations. The GOC continues peace talks with ELN, a smaller left-wing terrorist group, but without agreement. Talks continue in Cuba.
Drucker